

Message to the Church of Sardis: Does Your Character Match Your Reputation?

Revelation 3:1-6

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

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Introduction: Review the first 4 churches in our study. Which one best describes West Hampden? Sardis was an old & famous city, going back some 1,200 years before Christ. It was located 50 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, due east of Smyrna. There were actually two cities; one in the river valley, & another upon Mt. Tmolus. This fortress, 1,500 feet above the valley floor, had sheer sides, making it nearly invincible. Famous people lived there, such as: Solon, the great Greek legislator; Thales, the father of Greek philosophy; & Cresus, its most famous king ("as rich as Cresus"). Sardis was noted as a center of trade & commerce, situated at the hub of 4 great high-ways. The city was destroyed in A.D. 17 by an earthquake, later to be rebuilt with the help of the Roman emperor, Tiberius (who waived taxation for 5 years & contributed over \$250,000). The city dedicated a temple to the worship of Artemis. The Roman Peace brought great prosperity to the city, but contributed to its moral decline (known for its wealth & its wickedness). It appeared to be living, but it was dead. So too, the church there, which is designated in our study as a lifeless church (the church of "dead orthodoxy"). Consider this truth today: Your reputation is what men think you are; your character is what God knows you to be!

I. The **Command** (:1)

A. He that hath the seven Spirits of God > speaks of Christ's **sagacity** (wisdom)

1. Refers to the Holy Spirit - see Isaiah 11:2.
2. Used of Christ in Revelation 1:4.

B. He that hath the seven stars > speaks of Christ's **sovereignty**

1. The spiritual leaders of the church (pastors).
2. Speaks of their accountability to Christ (as well as Christ's possession & protection).

II. The **Condemnation** (:1-2) -- There is no **Commendation**!!

A. They had a name that they **lived** >

1. There was no persecution (at least known of these things mentioned).
2. There was no pressure from emperor worship.
3. There were no problems within (internal heresies).

B. They were **dead** - What are the signs of a dying church? >

1. Toleration - when it tolerates those who wish to turn it from the Scriptures.
2. Materialism - when it emphasizes external things, rather than spiritual.
3. Self-satisfaction - when it is satisfied with its present condition (content with its size, self, or service).

The church of Sardis had a reputation as a "spiritual" church, but it was in name only. Their works were not perfect (complete). Compare the modern church today: full of activity, but little or no spiritual power or effectiveness.

What are the signs of a living church?

1. Growth: spiritually, numerically, financially, evangelistically. See Acts 2:42-27.
2. Compassion: that which motivates evangelism.

III. The **Counsel** (to remant) (:2-4) [Recognize, Remember & Repent – or – 5 V's from D. Jeremiah]

A. Be **vigilant** (to the remnant) > "*Be watchful*"

1. "*Be watchful*" - wake up; stay awake & alert (from 2 Greek words: "chase sleep").
 - a. Matthew 26:40, "*Could you not watch (stay awake) with Me one hour?*"
 - b. Luke 12:39, "*...he would have watched (stayed awake) & not have suffered his house to be broken into.*"

2. Be watching at our weak point & our strong point (remember the history of the city).

B. Be **vigorous** > *"Strengthen the things which remain"*

1. Not everything was dead completely; some things could be strengthened.
2. Not everyone was lifeless spiritually; some had not defiled their garments (:4).

C. Be **victorious** > *"Remember therefore how thou hast received"*

1. Present tense > *"remember"* - 'keep on remembering.'
2. Perfect tense > *"hast received"* – action in the past, effects continue in the present.
Remember when they had received the Spirit of God through His Word: I Thessalonians 2:13, *"...ye received the Word of God... which effectually worketh also in you that ye believe."* (cf. Jeremiah 6:16).

D. Be **vibrant** > *"hold fast"*

1. Present tense > *"keep"* – used most often in reference to doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42).
2. Be faithful in holding & proclaiming the truths of God's Word.

E. Be **virtuous** > *"repent"* – come clean before God

1. Time for this church to confess its sins, forsake its deadness & start over.
2. "There must come a time in the life of everyone who is away from God when there is a change, a decision to leave sin & follow Christ, to forsake whatever is holding him back & yield completely to God." (Neal)

Summary: Consider the warning of verse 3b & the worthy of verse 4 >

1. The warning: Christ will come as a thief (unexpectedly).
 - a. A blessed truth for those living for Christ when He comes (Luke 12:43).
 - b. A sobering truth for those not living for Him (I John 2:28).
2. The worthy (*"few"* - a remnant) [God always has His *"few"*]:
 - a. Their testimony – they were undefiled; not contaminated with sin (James 1:27).
Consider the example of Joseph & Daniel (living in a wicked society).
 - b. Their triumph – the picture of a victory march of the triumphant Roman general.
Consider the promise - their enemies defeated & Christians led in triumph (Col. 2:15).

IV. The **Challenge** (:5-6)

A. He that **overcometh** >

1. Shall be clothed in white raiment
 - a. Speaks of purity - imputed righteousness or imparted righteousness?? (see 19:8).
 - b. White garments to wear when they walk before Him - Rev. 3:18; 4:4; 6:11.
2. Shall be continued in the book of life (cf. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).
 - a. Book of Life - all those with human life; all humanity for which Christ died.
 - b. Those reaching "maturity" or the "age of accountability" who reject Christ have their names blotted out (or consider historical example of city's registry).
3. Shall be confessed before God the Father & His angels.
 - a. If we confess Him before men, He will confess us before the Father - Mt. 10:32.
 - b. Compare having one's name presented to the President; much greater before God.

B. He that **hath an ear** >

1. The Spirit's message to the seven churches.
2. The Spirit's message to any individual willing to hear.

Conclusion: The church at Sardis had the reputation of being alive, when in reality it was dead. How about you; how about our church? Could you be living a lie? Do you appear to be a Christian; yet not truly saved or genuinely living for the Lord? "Let us search our hearts & ask whether we have real spiritual life or merely a name to live, whether we are fruitful in the service of Christ, or as dead as the church at Sardis?" (Neal) Would we be described as a dying church, characterized by toleration, materialism, & self-satisfaction? Or could we be identified as a living church, evidenced by our growth & compassion? Let us be vigilant, vigorous, victorious, vibrant, & virtuous. Do not make the same mistake that Samson did (see Judges 16:20). Remember, your reputation is what men think you are; your character is what God knows you to be! Does your character match your reputation?